

THE CHARITY BAZAAR
BY
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

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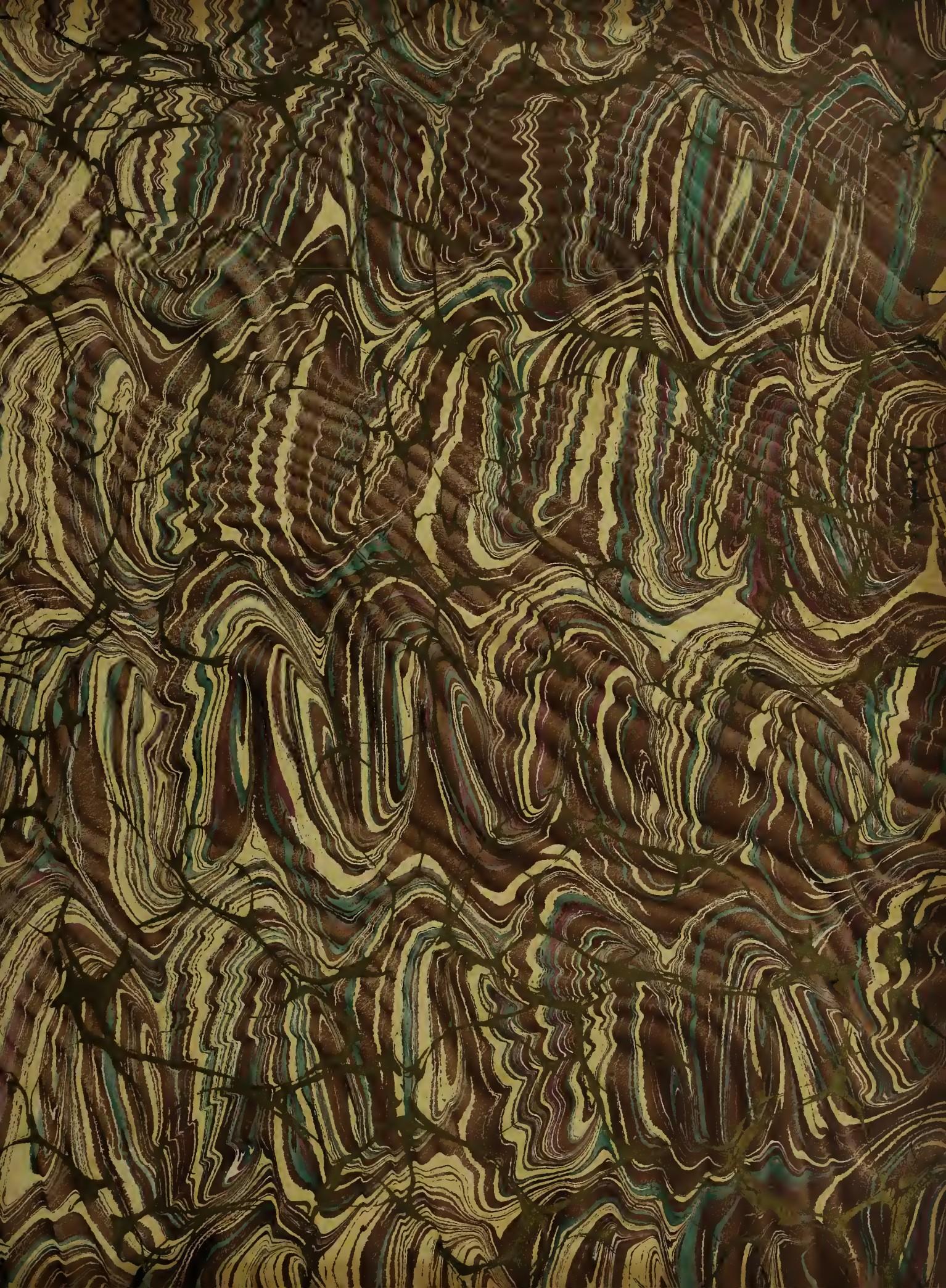
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THE
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BAZAAR,
BY
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

SIGNED

By THE AUTHOR.



THE CHARITY BAZAAR: AN ALLEGORICAL DIALOGUE.

PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUE.

THE INGENUOUS PUBLIC.

HIS WIFE.

THE TOUT.

The Tout, in an allegorical costume, holding a silver trumpet in his right hand, is discovered on the steps in front of the Bazaar. He sounds a preliminary flourish.

The Tout.—Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the honour to announce a sale of many interesting, beautiful, rare, quaint, comical, and necessary articles. Here you will find objects of taste, such as Babies' Shoes, Children's Petticoats, and Shetland Wool Cravats; objects of general usefulness, such as Tea-cosies, Bangles, Brahmin Beads, and Madras Baskets; and objects of imperious necessity, such as Pen-wipers, Indian Figures carefully repaired with glue, and Sealed Envelopes, containing a surprise. And all this is not to be sold by your common Shopkeepers, intent on small and legitimate profits, but by Ladies and Gentlemen, who would as soon think of picking your pocket of a cotton handkerchief, as of selling a single one of these many interesting, beautiful, rare, quaint, comical, and necessary articles at less than twice its market value. (*He sounds another flourish.*)

The Wife.—This seems a very fair-spoken young man.

The Ingenuous Public (addressing the Tout).—Sir, I am a man of simple and

untutored mind ; but I apprehend that this sale, of which you give us so glowing a description, is neither more nor less than a Charity Bazaar ?

The Tout.—Sir, your penetration has not deceived you.

The Ingenuous Public.—Into which you seek to entice unwary passengers ?

The Tout.—Such is my office.

The Ingenuous Public.—But is not a Charity Bazaar, Sir, a place where, for ulterior purposes, amateur goods are sold at a price above their market value ?

The Tout.—I perceive you are no novice. Let us sit down, all three, upon the doorsteps, and reason this matter at length. The position is a little conspicuous, but airy and convenient.

(*The Tout seats himself on the second step, the Ingenuous Public and his Wife to right and left of him, one step below.*)

The Tout.—Shopping is one of the dearest pleasures of the human heart.

The Wife.—Indeed, Sir, and that it is.

The Tout.—The choice of articles, apart from their usefulness, is an appetising occupation, and to exchange bald, uniform shillings for a fine big, figurative knick-knack, such as a windmill, a gross of green spectacles, or a cocked hat, gives us a direct and emphatic sense of gain. We have had many shillings before, as good as these ; but this is the first time we have possessed a windmill. Upon these principles of human nature, Sir, is based the theory of the Charity Bazaar. People were doubtless charitably disposed. The problem was to make the exercise of charity entertaining in itself—you follow me, Madam ?—and in the Charity Bazaar a satisfactory solution was attained. The act of giving away money for charitable purposes is, by this admirable invention, transformed into an amusemeut, and puts on the externals of profitable commerce. You play at shopping awhile ; and in order to keep up the illusion, sham goods do actually change hands. Thus, under the similitude of a game, I have seen children confronted with the horrors of arithmetic, and even taught to gargle.

The Ingenuous Public.—You expound this subject very magisterially, Sir. But tell me, would it not be possible to carry this element of play still further? and after I had remained a proper time in the Bazaar, and negotiated a sufficient number of sham bargains, would it not be possible to return me my money in the hall?

The Tout.—I question whether that would not impair the humour of the situation. And besides, my dear Sir, the pith of the whole device is to take that money from you.

The Ingenuous Public.—True. But at least the Bazaar might take back the tea-cosies and pen-wipers.

The Tout.—I have no doubt, if you were to ask it handsomely, that you would be so far accommodated. Still it is out of the theory. The sham goods, for which, believe me, I readily understand your disaffection—the sham goods are well adapted for their purpose. Your lady wife will lay these tea-cosies and pen-wipers aside in a safe place, until she is asked to contribute to another Charity Bazaar. There the tea-cosies and pen-wipers will be once more charitably sold. The new purchasers, in their turn, will accurately imitate the dispositions of your lady wife. In short, Sir, the whole affair is a cycle of operations. The tea-cosies and pen-wipers are merely counters; they come off and on again like a stage army; and year after year people pretend to buy and pretend to sell them, with a vivacity that seems to indicate a talent for the stage. But in the course of these illusory manœuvres, a great deal of money is given in charity, and that in a picturesque, bustling, and agreeable manner. If you have to travel somewhere on business, you would choose the prettiest route, and desire pleasant companions by the way. And why not show the same spirit in giving alms?

The Ingenuous Public.—Sir, I am profoundly indebted to you for all you have said. I am, Sir, your absolute convert.

The Wife.—Let us lose no more time, but enter the Charity Bazaar.

The Ingenuous Public.—Yes; let us enter the Charity Bazaar.

*Both (singing).—Let us enter, let us enter, let us enter,
Let us enter the Charity Bazaar !*

(An interval is supposed to elapse. The Ingenuous Public and his Wife are discovered issuing from the Charity Bazaar.)

The Wife.—How fortunate you should have brought your cheque-book !

The Ingenuous Public.—Well, fortunate in a sense. (*Addressing the Tout*)—Sir, I shall send a van in the course of the afternoon for the little articles I have purchased. I shall not say good-bye ; because I shall probably take a lift in the front seat, not from any solicitude, believe me, about the little articles, but as the last opportunity I may have for some time of enjoying the costly entertainment of a drive.

THE SCENE CLOSES.

Robert Louis Stevenson

